

INTRODUCTION OF THE MEDICARE  
CRITICAL NEED GME PROTECTION  
ACT

**HON. FORTNEY PETE STARK**

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, May 21, 2001*

Mr. STARK. Mr. Speaker, I rise today along with several of my Congressional colleagues to introduce "The Medicare Critical Need GME Protection Act of 2001." This legislation seeks to protect our nation against the growing depletion of health care professionals fully trained to treat costly and deadly illnesses.

Under current law, the Medicare program provides reimbursement to hospitals for the direct costs of graduate medical education training. That reimbursement is designed to cover the direct training costs of residents in their initial residency training period. If a resident decides to proceed with further training in a specialty or subspecialty, however, a hospital's reimbursement is cut to half, 50 percent, for that additional training.

The rationale for this policy is strong. In general, we have an oversupply of specialty physicians in our country and a real need to increase the number of primary care providers. By reducing the reimbursement for specialty training, the Medicare program has promoted needed increases in primary care training rather than specialty positions.

I agree with this policy. However, as is often the case, there are always exceptions to the rule. We do not want to hinder training of particular specialties or subspecialties if there is strong evidence that there is a serious shortage of those particular physicians. That is why I am introducing The Medicare Critical Need GME Protection Act.

Child and adolescent psychiatry is a clear example of how certain subspecialties face critical professional shortages. The 2001 report of the Surgeon General's Conference on Children's Mental Health states that almost one in ten children suffer from mental illnesses severe enough to impair development, yet fewer than one in five get treatment. One huge barrier is the clear dearth of child and adolescent psychiatrists.

Today there are roughly 7000 fully trained child and adolescent psychiatrists in the entire United States with only 300 additional psychiatrists completing specialty training each year. These numbers fall far short of what is needed to meet prevalence rates that identify nearly 15 million children and adolescents in need of mental health treatment. That means that many vulnerable young people will suffer needlessly, unable to access the help they desperately need.

To provide another example of a current subspecialty facing serious professional shortages, we can look at nephrology. Between 1986-1995, the number of patients with End Stage Renal disease, ESRD, more than doubled, with over a quarter of a million people now on dialysis. Yet current data indicate that only 51.8 percent of today's nephrologists will still be in practice in the year 2010.

Most primary care physicians are not trained to treat the complex multi-symptom medical problems typically seen in ESRD and are unfamiliar with specific medications and technology prescribed for such patients. The decreasing supply of nephrologists, coupled with

an expanding population of renal patients, puts the health of our nation at risk.

The Medicare Critical Need GME Protection Act provides a tool to help combat such shortages of qualified professionals. The bill would simply provide the Secretary of Health and Human Services with the flexibility to continue full funding for a specialty or subspecialty training program if there is evidence that the program has a current shortage, or faces an imminent shortage, or health care professionals to meet the needs of our health care system.

The Secretary would grant this exception only for a limited number of years and would have complete control of the exception process. Programs would present evidence of the shortage and the Secretary could agree or disagree with the analysis. Nothing in this bill would require the Secretary to take any action whatsoever.

The bill also includes protections for budget neutrality. If the Secretary approves a specialty or subspecialty training program for full funding under this bill, the Secretary must adjust direct GME payments to ensure that no additional funds are spent.

Again, The Medical Critical Need GME Protection Act does nothing more than provide limited flexibility to the Secretary of Health and Human Services to ensure that we are training the health care professionals that meet our nation's needs.

I encourage my colleagues to join me in support of this important legislation. By giving the Secretary the flexibility to allocate funds to attract and train professionals in certain 'at risk' fields of medicine, we will significantly improve patient care and lower long-term health care costs.

AWARD FOR SOUTH TEXAS  
SCHOOLS

**HON. SOLOMON P. ORTIZ**

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, May 21, 2001*

Mr. ORTIZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to three schools in South Texas which are beating the odds in today's public education system by harnessing the strength and awareness of the student population.

At a time when our resources are terribly over-burdened, the following South Texas schools are being recognized by the "Set A Good Example" competition sponsored by the Concerned Businessmen of America: Landrum Elementary in San Benito (2nd place nationally), Harlingen High School (2nd place nationally), and Rio Hondo Elementary (top ten honors).

These awards, launched in 1982, recognize schools which have student-oriented programs to influence their peers in a positive way by emphasizing the simple human moral values such as honesty, trustworthiness, responsibility, competence and fairness.

The Concerned Businessmen of America is a not-for-profit charitable educational organization which offers successful business strategies and programs to combat social ills and problems that face young people.

At a time when parents and community leaders are watching our young people with new eyes, wondering what is going on inside

their minds and what motivates them, this recognition is concrete proof that the South Texas community is paying attention to our young people.

Educators, counselors, parents, business people, and most importantly, students themselves, are working together to ward off the problems that have plagued other schools and other young people. The winning ingredient here is the active involvement of the students; the best messenger for young people is other young people.

We have enormous challenges before us in education and with regard to the public policy in our public schools. There will never be one single answer to preparing young people to withstand the complex social issues that our children encounter each day. But the best way to prepare our children to deal with the society in which we live is to teach them, from very early on, simple moral guidelines to apply to their lives. The "Set a Good Example" program follows up as encouragement and reinforcement to these lessons.

I ask my colleagues to join me in commending Landrum Elementary in San Benito, Harlingen High School, and Rio Hondo Elementary for their efforts to be part of a solution, which is the first step to solving the problem. I thank the young people in these schools for leading the way to better grades and healthier attitudes.

HONORING A FALLEN HERO,  
FIREFIGHTER SCOTT L. NELSON

**HON. SCOTT McINNIS**

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, May 21, 2001*

Mr. McINNIS. Mr. Speaker, in July of 1976 a 900 acre wild fire ripped through the Battlement Creek area of Western Colorado. During the blaze, four brave forest service firefighters from different parts of the country were killed while trying to knock out one of the deadliest forest fires in recent memory. On July 21st of 2001, these four men will be honored at the opening of a memorial to be dedicated in their memory. I ask that Congress take a moment to honor these four men for giving their lives in the line of duty.

The four-day blaze which claimed the lives of three hotshot firefighters and one pilot was started by lightning, and took nearly 300 fire fighters to douse the blaze. Twenty-five year old Scott L. Nelson was born in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin. Scott was a rookie firefighter on the Mormon Hotshots. He completed his basic training during May of 1976. During the summer of 1976, Scott got an assignment with the Mormon Lake Hotshots out of the Coconino National Forest in Arizona.

On the Morning of July 17, 1976, the crew was assigned to build a section of fire line to protect Federal lands belonging to the BLM. The hotshots were working on a section of fire line on the upper east side of the fire. With out warning, the fire took off and overran Scott and two other crewmembers. The fourth member of the crew survived.

Mr. Speaker, four men gave their lives protecting Federal land during the Battlement Creek fire in July of 1976. Scott L. Nelson and his crew will be honored by the citizens of the Battlement Creek area for their courage and